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ABSTRACT

This publication lists teaching techniques that have been suggested as effective with adults who have suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities. The list is not all inclusive, but it does provide suggestions for techniques and methods that may be useful in teaching adult learners. The techniques are grouped into four categories: (1) to improve student involvement; (2) to help instructors introduce lessons effectively; (3) to help instructors reach adult learners; and (4) to foster self-esteem in students. (YLB)

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TECHNIQUES

Working With Adults With Learning Disabilities

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Research on teaching techniques for adults with learning disabilities is limited. The majority of research on learning disabilities instruction has focused on children, and these techniques do not necessarily work well with adults. The following is a list of teaching techniques that have been suggested as effective with adults who have suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities. This list is not all inclusive, but it does provide suggestions for techniques and methods that may be useful in teaching adult learners.

Instructors and students should agree on the expected outcome of a program. They both should be involved in developing work plans on how they expect to reach the student's goals. The following techniques may help to improve student involvement.

✓ Help set realistic goals.

✓ Set short-term goals so the student can experience immediate successes.

✓ Consider meeting goals in a variety of ways. Be creative and flexible.

✓ Involve the student in determining how to evaluate specific goals.

✓ Involve students in the evaluation of their progress.

✓ Get adult students tested for hearing and vision problems, if necessary.

✓ Develop a written work plan with learners and make sure they fully understand it.

✓ Talk with students about what techniques work best for them.

✓ Discover what truly interests the learner through listening, discussions, and observations.

✓ Respect the uniqueness of each individual.

✓ Encourage risk-taking.

✓ Help students identify techniques that might be helpful in accommodating their learning disabilities.

Before students can begin assignments, they have to understand the instructions. The following techniques may help instructors introduce lessons effectively.

✓ Tape record or videotape the instructions.

✓ Make announcements in both oral and written forms -- especially changes in the schedule, directions, assignments, or exams.

✓ Have a model of the finished product available for review.

✓ Show by example.

✓ Make directions specific, concrete, and understandable.

✓ Tell your student what the whole lesson will concern, and explain what will be done first, second, and so on.

✓ Give a number of options for completing assignments.

✓ Review major points of previous sessions. Preview main points to be covered. Outline both in several ways: written on the board, presented

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orally, and outlined in a handout.

✓ Make clear transitions from one task to another.

The key to effective teaching is to identify and employ techniques and methods that work with students. It is easier for instructors to adjust their teaching methods than it is for students to change the way they learn. The following suggestions may help instructors reach adult learners.

✓ Build on strengths rather than repeating weaknesses.

✓ Make eye contact frequently; this helps in maintaining attention and encouraging participation.

✓ Teach new concepts by relating them to practical applications.

✓ Be sure reading material is at the right level for the learner.

✓ Be sure print type is large enough.

✓ Relate material to everyday situations.

✓ Use language experience approaches and reading materials from the home and work environment to stimulate interest.

✓ Build on what the student already knows, making learning developmental, not remedial.

✓ Probe "incorrect" responses to discover thought processes.

✓ Teach students to correct their own mistakes.

✓ Do not assume that the learner knows something until you ask or teach it.

✓ Be creative and attempt to vary your teaching style.

✓ Encourage students to sit in the front of the classroom where they can hear well and have a clear view of the chalkboard.

✓ Keep the learning environment free of visual and auditory distraction.

✓ Establish a routine; this promotes organization and consistency.

✓ Use multisensory strategies to present materials: many learners must see, say, hear, and touch before they can develop full mental images that stick and make sense.

✓ Provide short term tasks with short breaks between tasks.

✓ Be flexible with time schedules: work quotas should be adjusted to fit the work speed of each learner.

✓ Repeat the activity until learning is accomplished, and provide opportunities to review.

✓ Vary your lessons, reteaching and reviewing in varieties of ways.

✓ Respect different learning styles.

✓ Use materials that relate to an individual's experiences.

✓ Change an activity when it's not working.

✓ De-emphasize timed tests.

✓ Incorporate keyboards (word processors or typewriters) into the lesson as much as possible. Studies show that some learners can produce 15 times more writing with a word processor than they can with a pencil or pen.

✓ Use formulas or rhymes to assist the memory.

✓ Encourage the use of learning aids and tools (e.g., calculators, highlighter pens, extra worksheets, computerized learning programs, records, tape recorders, films, demon-

strations, maps, charts, experiences, fingers, rulers.)

✓ Use color whenever possible for visual impact.

✓ Provide the student opportunities to repeat verbally what has been taught as a check for accuracy.

✓ Work with other teachers and professionals and ask for ideas or opinions.

✓ Encourage the learner to find a mentor in addition to the tutor. The mentor can help the learner review information and apply classroom skills to practical situations.

✓ Suggest reinforcement activities to be used at home, e.g., posting new words on the refrigerator door, repeated listening to a tape of vocabulary words, watching recommended educational television programs.

✓ Talk with students about their learning process. Ask them what does and does not work for them.

The better students feel about their learning experience, the harder they try. A positive environment will foster self-esteem in students, encouraging them to return.

Consider the following when working with adult students:

✓ Pay attention to self-concept enhancement when working with learning disabled students.

✓ Do not embarrass, or insinuate laziness, or discourage an individual publicly or privately.

✓ Reduce emphasis on competition and perfection.

✓ Praise the learner's accomplishments at the end of every session.

✓ Communicate to students that you value them through smiling, listening, and eye contact.

✓ Incorporate a sense of humor into the learning process.

✓ Praise what you might consider small or minor successes.

✓ Emphasize students' strengths and encourage them to exercise them.

✓ Reinforce the effort and progress of the student.

✓ Teach to each student's strengths and make each student a "star" as often as possible.

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